

MUSIC AND ART, THE BILINGUAL WAY



THROUGH ITS UNIQUE CURRICULUM, PAT'S SCHOOLHOUSE (AROOZOO AVENUE) ENCOURAGES SELF-EXPRESSION, AND NURTURES CREATIVITY AND IMAGINATION IN CHILDREN.

At Pat's Schoolhouse (Aroozoo Avenue), a SPARK-certified centre, children are encouraged to dance, sing, paint, think, imagine and create — in both English and Chinese. Its Bilingual Immersion Core Curriculum means that English and Chinese teachers are partners in the classroom to co-create, plan and implement experiences for children's language learning.

As part of the centre's bilingual music appreciation syllabus, children learn English and Chinese songs and talk about what the music evokes in them, in both languages. Similarly, during art and craft activities, children express themselves not only through their artwork but also in their conversations on the process and their creations in English and Chinese.

"Using music and art as tools to facilitate children's language acquisition allows them to enrich and deepen their appreciation of culture and languages. For our teachers, this enables them to nurture their children's creativity and imagination, as well as their bilingualism through inquiry and play. Research supports this," says the centre's Principal, Ms Sharlene Quah.



Ms Quah and her children dancing while holding Boomwhackers

While there is strong emphasis on bilingualism and creativity, the curriculum also supports the all-rounded development of young learners. "When a child grips a paintbrush, or glues buttons and yarn to paper, and discusses his artwork, he engages his fine motor, language and thinking skills. When he dances, sings, skips or claps in time to the music, his whole brain is stimulated," explains Ms Quah.



A child drawing a self-portrait

TEACHERS AS FACILITATORS

"Teachers play an important role," adds Ms Quah. They observe and facilitate important interactions that encourage children to listen, speak, read and write in response to the open-ended questions that teachers pose in English and Chinese.

It has also helped the children become flexible and creative thinkers. They become more confident learners and find new ways of doing things. According to Ms Quah, being SPARK-certified has enabled the centre to hone its skills in planning and implementing its Bilingual Immersion Core Curriculum effectively, and to be more reflective of its outcomes on teaching and learning. ❤️



Children listening to different kinds of music and then painting how the music makes them feel



The Singapore Preschool Accreditation Framework (SPARK) aims to help pre-schools raise their quality by serving as a guide and providing quality benchmarks. It provides recognition and support for pre-school leaders in their effort to improve teaching and learning, administration and management process. For more information on SPARK, visit www.ecda.gov.sg/SPARKinfo

GIVING HER BEST

FOR HELPING CHILDREN BECOME THE BEST VERSION OF THEMSELVES, MS JANE MAYRIEL SINGH WON THE OUTSTANDING EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER AWARD AT THE ECDA AWARDS 2017.



Activities like nature walks offer children a rich and immersive learning experience



Growing up in a big extended family cemented Ms Jane Mayriel Singh's love for children and motivated her entry into the EC sector in 2010. The 28-year-old is currently a K2 Senior English Language Teacher at The Little Skool-House International (By-The-Vista).

See a short video of her at <http://bit.ly/Awards-JaneMayriel>.

How does it feel to receive this award?

I am very thankful. I want to continue growing professionally, which is why I recently started my Master of Education (Early Childhood) degree as an ECDA Scholarship recipient. With this, I hope to contribute to my centre and the EC sector by mentoring and inspiring newer teachers to upgrade their knowledge and skills.

Tell us your teaching philosophy.

Understanding each child's strengths is key to guiding his thinking and learning. It is important to find out what each child needs and customise his experiences. We will then be in a more informed position to optimise his potential. Inculcating values is equally important. Children need to understand the value of helping others. For example, if a child is

a strong reader, I will encourage him to be a reading buddy to his peers.

Share with us your pedagogical practices.

One writer I constantly refer to is Kath Murdoch, whose work on inquiry-based learning guides our centre's pedagogical practices. Some of the key elements include using authentic objects and settings, making meaningful connections across different subjects and going beyond the classroom to enrich learning interests.

What qualifies as a rich and immersive learning experience?

It is one that engages the children, provokes their thinking and encourages them to ask questions. For instance, I organised an overnight Friendship Camp

for my class. Activities included group tasks, brainstorming and discussions. We also organised a daytime forest walk, where the children had to navigate past natural obstacles such as rocks and streams. Such experiences expose children to new things and different perspectives, deal with challenges and help cultivate their risk-taking dispositions.

How would you describe your relationship with the children's families?

Trust and open communication are key to building a strong relationship with families which takes time. I find it important to take the first step towards relationship building. Initiate conversations with parents. This can be done informally during drop-off and pick-up times. I make it a practice to invite parents to volunteer for various activities on a regular basis. ♥

I like teacher Jane's class because we get to do a lot of different things. The Friendship Camp is my favourite. We went hiking. While going down a hill, my friends and I decided to slide down the soil instead of walking — that was fun!

Isaac Mok, 5, a student in Ms Singh's class



HOW TO ENRICH YOUR CHILD'S LEARNING

Ms Singh says that educators can create rich learning experiences when they:

- **THINK OUT OF THE BOX.** Challenge the status quo and weave in innovative elements into the curriculum.
- **INVOLVE PARENTS.** When a child expresses an interest in a topic, involve parents and turn it into a family project. Invite them to share it at pre-school.
- **TAP ON COMMUNITY PARTNERS.** Draw on external expertise to value-add to the curriculum. Bring the children's learning beyond the pre-school.



Doreen makes it a point to observe the children in class

LEADING THE CHANGE

EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADER MS DOREEN LIM BELIEVES IN INSPIRING AND MOTIVATING HER TEACHERS TO EMBRACE CHANGE.

In her 16 years of being a leader, Ms Doreen Lim, 45, has accumulated a wealth of experience to mentor and be a good role model for her teachers. "I want to inspire them to work towards achieving better outcomes for the children and for themselves professionally," says the 2017 ECDA Outstanding Early Childhood Leader award winner. She shares her tips.

EMBRACE CHANGE

As Lead Centre Principal of PCF Sparkletots Preschool @ Hong Kah North at Block 419, Doreen's key challenges are to manage change and motivate her educators to embrace change. "The early childhood landscape in Singapore is evolving. We need to see this change as an opportunity to examine existing processes, practices and our effectiveness as EC professionals. It is also important for the whole team to share this notion of change to make way for new ideas and improvements," she says.

KNOW THE SITUATION ON THE GROUND

Doreen believes a leader should work the ground with her teachers. In her daily walkabouts, she interacts with different groups of children and teachers to know them personally. "It is important to understand the

profile of each teacher and observe them in practice. I make it a point to observe how the children are experiencing the classroom activities," she adds. "Being tuned-in, I am able to support and guide my teachers on a one-on-one basis, and to have a constructive discussion on addressing our children's learning and developmental needs."

SHARE TO LEARN, LEARN TO SHARE

Doreen's monthly meetings are a sounding board for the teachers, who use this platform to brainstorm and bounce off ideas on good classroom practices, community projects and other issues. It is also an opportunity to keep up with what is happening in the EC landscape. "We also have regular peer sharing sessions," she says. "One senior teacher shared with junior teachers how pictorial cue cards can be used to remind children about acceptable and unacceptable behaviours." When teachers share their tried-and-tested strategies with their peers, the 'feel good' factor boosts their confidence as professionals.



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Ms Doreen Lim



Regular peer sharing sessions build teachers' knowledge and confidence

THE CHILD AT THE HEART

At the heart of everything she does, Doreen believes in putting the child first. It is not about rigidly following a curriculum. She says, "But rather, we need to ensure that children make sense and find meaning in learning. We need to help them make the connections."

CONTINUE TO GROW

Spurred on by winning the Leader award, Doreen has set goals for herself in the next three to five years. She elaborates: "I want to work towards building larger, more cohesive and high-performing teams. Participating in more overseas study trips and leadership attachments will allow me to learn about the EC landscape and best practices beyond our shores. I look forward to more opportunities for educators to work together and exchange ideas and best practices. It is through these collegial relationships that we can truly make a difference to our professional thinking and practices, and build a strong foundation for the holistic development of our young children." ♥